

## **Cherokee National Forest Benton Falls Incident Update Monday - May 19, 2006**

### **The Incident:**

On Thursday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, between 3:30 and 4:00 p.m., a black bear attack took place in the Ocoee-Hiwassee Ranger District near the Chilhowee Recreation Area which is located about 22 miles east of Cleveland, Tennessee. A 45-year old woman, Susan Cenkus, of Clyde Ohio, and her two-year old son, Luke, were injured in the attack. Six-year old Elora Petrasek, (Susan Cenkus' daughter) died in the attack.

A black bear was captured on Sunday, April 16<sup>th</sup> on Chilhowee Mountain in the Cherokee National Forest. It was captured near the site of the bear attack. Forest Service and TWRA officials are optimistic that it is the bear responsible for the attack on Thursday. Tracks from a bear that visited the attack site on April 14 & 15 closely match the captured bear's paws.

### **Test Results:**

The bear's body was taken to the University of Tennessee Veterinary Teaching Hospital in Knoxville, Tennessee where a necropsy was performed. The results of this procedure did not provide any immediate evidence that the bear was involved in the attack.

Samples and other evidence have been gathered and is being evaluated by appropriate testing facilities for further forensic analysis. The results of the analysis may take longer since the techniques and technology normally used to deal with human-on-human incidents are being adapted to deal with a wild animal.

### **Trapping Operations:**

Shortly after the attack the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) coordinated a search for the bear with dogs. When this effort proved unsuccessful culvert traps and snares were set in the search area, one close to the site of the attack and several others in a one and a half mile area surrounding it. A bear captured Sunday April 16 was found in the trap close to the attack site, while a second bear captured Monday April 17 was found in one of the perimeter traps (1 mile away). The second bear was transported alive to a holding facility. Since the second bear was captured all the perimeter traps have been deactivated. The trap and bait station near the attack site was left until Monday May 1. The area had been closely monitored and there has been no other bear activity in the search area. Bear experts believe this is a positive sign that there are no other bears in the immediate area.

**Area Closure:**

The Chilhowee Recreation Area and the Parksville Campground as well as roads and trails leading to the area will remain closed until results of the various tests being performed have been gathered and analyzed.

**Family and Victims:**

The mother, Susan Cenkus, of the 6-year-old girl fatally wounded in the attack was treated and cared for at Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Susan's two-year old son, Luke was treated and cared for at T.C. Thompson Children's Hospital in Chattanooga. Luke was released from the hospital on April 21<sup>st</sup> and is back in Ohio with family members. Susan was released from the hospital May 2<sup>nd</sup> and has returned to Ohio. Funeral services for Susan's daughter Elora Petrasek were conducted May 6<sup>th</sup> at 1100 in Clyde, Ohio.

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